

one or two of these birds round about our house, so it may take time before we can definitely include the Crow-Pheasant in this list.

In all these present instances the unripe fruit full of latex on the plant is never touched.

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## 9. POINT CALIMERE AS A REFUGE FOR WINTERING SHORE BIRDS

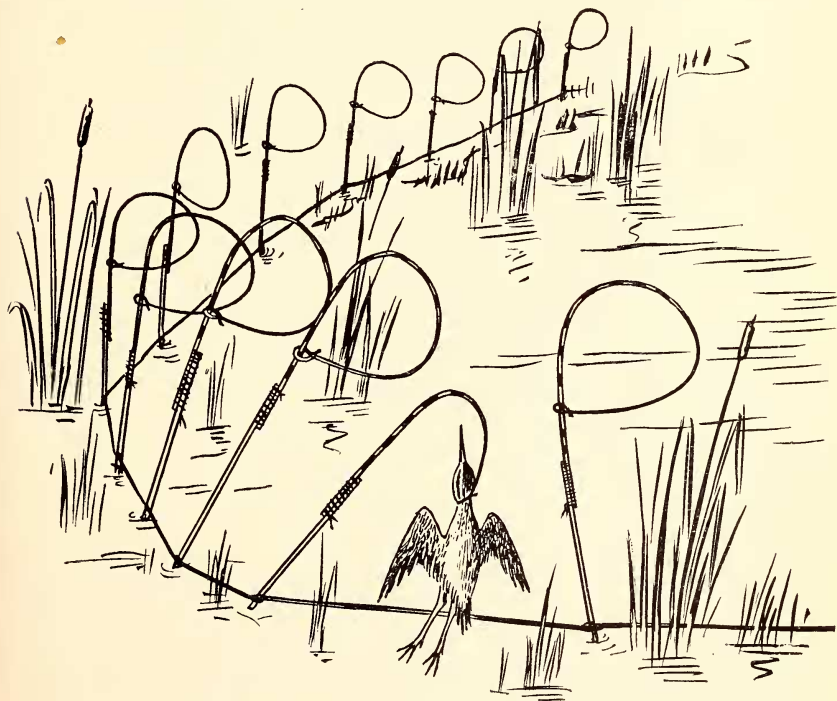
(With a text-figure)

The Asian Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) whose headquarters are in Tokyo, Japan, has been fully alive to the need for a proper investigation of the movements of migratory wading birds (Charadriidae) in south and south-east Asia, and anxious to promote the establishment of refuges for them while on passage or wintering in these countries. The Section was recently allotted a small monetary grant by the World Wildlife Fund through the world body (ICBP) for the furtherance of this objective, a part of which it has passed on to the Indian National Section for appropriate utilization. Partly to prospect in this connection and partly in order to explore the possibilities of netting shore-birds for investigating their role, if any, in the dissemination of arthropod-borne viruses (cf. the BNHS/WHO Bird Migration Field Project), but chiefly at the invitation of the Government of Madras to assess the suitability of Point Calimere for their proposed shore-birds sanctuary, I visited the area from 10th to 16th November 1962.

Point Calimere ( $10^{\circ} 18' N. \times 79^{\circ} 51' E.$ ) lies in the Tanjavur (Tanjore) District of Madras State, about 200 miles south of Madras City. The area is an extensive coastal belt of some 50,000 acres (or more?) of tidal mudflats, salt marshes, and lagoons along the southern Bay of Bengal, and about 30 miles from the Jaffna Peninsula of Ceylon across Palk Strait. The stunted scrub jungle bordering the backwaters and mudflats consists of shrubs and moderate-sized trees of *Mimusops hexandra*, *Memecylon edule*, *Bassia latifolia*, *Carissa carandas*, *Eugenia jambolana*, and other species. Further inland from the edge, the scrub becomes denser and merges into

thorn forest, interspersed here and there with open low-lying grassy maidans. Considerable numbers of cheetal, blackbuck, and pig are still to be seen here though reportedly much reduced by poaching. The thick shrubbery—up to 10 or 12 feet high—consists largely of *Dichrostachys* sp. (an acacia-like plant with yellow-tipped pink pompom flowers), *Randia dumetorum*, *Zizyphus oenoplia*, *Carissa carandas*, *Cassia fistula* and *C. auriculata*, and other species. Contrary to the season in the Bombay area, *Gloriosa superba* was flowering profusely everywhere in this terrain. Also, an epiphyte—*Vitis quadrangularis*—was common on the trees.

Bird life was not particularly abundant in the scrub jungle though of considerable variety. But the mudflats and shallow lagoons were (at the time of my visit) alive with wading birds—sandpipers, plovers, etc.—in addition to the large flocks (thousands) of flamingos (*P. ruber*), for whom they are reported to be regular feeding grounds in winter. In a trial catch with the help of a local professional fowler using rows of upright *Borassus* palm fibre nooses (see sketch) strung out



*Borassus* palm fibre nooses used by local fowler

more or less at random along the mudflats, over 120 birds were taken within a few hours including such species as *Philomachus pugnax*.

*Charadrius mongolus*, *C. alexandrinus*, *Tringa totanus*, *T. stagnatilis*<sup>1</sup>, *T. glareola*, *Calidris minutus*, and others—also two Roseate Terns (*Sterna dougalli*) and a single Rednecked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*). With the co-operation and collaboration of the Wildlife Preservation Department of the State, it seems possible to do very profitable large scale ringing of shore-birds in this locality, using mist nets and decoys, and also other local techniques.

Little is known about the migrations of the Charadriidae that visit India in winter, and nothing at all regarding their significance as arthropod-borne virus disseminators; Point Calimere offers an exceptional venue for these studies. As a result of my prospecting, it was planned to send out a BNHS field party in December to commence ringing work, but owing to certain procedural snags permission for netting could not be granted by the Madras Government. It is to be hoped that these difficulties are only of a temporary nature and that it will be possible to utilize the opportunities to the full during the coming autumn.

According to a recently retired lighthouse keeper of Point Calimere lighthouse for 25 years, large numbers of birds ('land as well as aquatic') are regularly observed every year between late August and early November flying over Point Calimere 'in a steady stream' in a southward direction across Palk Strait and towards Ceylon. It would be interesting to investigate this report in greater detail. Large numbers of the Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) are also reliably reported to pass through Point Calimere on their way south to Ceylon for a fortnight or so in every October. In view of our utter ignorance regarding the local migrations of this conspicuous species the place would seem to provide a wonderful opportunity for intercepting and ringing these birds in adequate quantity.

33, PALI HILL,  
BANDRA,  
BOMBAY 50,  
May 13, 1963.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the ringed Marsh Sandpipers (*T. stagnatilis*) has since been recovered in the U.S.S.R. For particulars see p. 461—EDS.